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Melinda Chateauvert. *Marching Together: Women of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.* Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1998. xiv + 267 pp. $21.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-252-06636-8; $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-252-02340-8.

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Sisters in Trade Unionism

Melinda Chateauvert's *Marching Together: Women of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters* examines the history of the Ladies Auxiliary of the International Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (IBSCP). Composed primarily of wives and female relatives of sleeping car porters, these women became labor conscious activists who organized to demand citizenship, consumer, and workers rights. They simultaneously expanded traditional race, gender, and class boundaries while implementing a political agenda that exploited the "concepts of black manhood, female respectability, and class consciousness" (p. xi). Through extensive use of archival materials, Chateauvert proves that Auxiliary women gave critical political and financial support to the IBSCP in its early years and through its trade union activities laid a foundation for the modern civil rights movement. The study begins with a discussion of the organization of the Ladies Auxiliary of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and concludes with the demise of the organization in 1957.

In the early years of its organization, the IBSCP had ample resources–money, publicity, outside support, and members–to support the union, and 1920s images of the "New Woman" allowed some flexibility in gender roles. However, as the economy tightened and resources began to diminish, the IBSCP sought to court the support of white labor unions by insisting that its members adopt complementary roles for labor men and women as had white labor unions. The IBSCP reinforced this gender hierarchy by writing new by-laws that established a separate women's auxiliary. Male leadership regarded the Ladies Auxiliary as a body of wives, not workers, even though many auxiliary members worked as Pullman maids. Randolph instructed the Ladies Auxiliary to help build the Brotherhood, and some women in the auxiliary believed this meant "bolstering a husband's morale, making him feel like a man, restoring him for the fight" (p. 61). The Auxiliary by-laws however, reflected a more active and involved role for its members. The preamble called upon women to "advance, protect and conserve" the "economic, social, moral and intellectual" interests of its members and defined a broad-based program for action (p. 62). Members of the Ladies Auxiliary saw themselves as the politically conscious consumer-oriented arm of the trade union movement. Women in the auxiliary pursued political and consumer activi-

ties that included fundraising for the union; investigating racial discrimination in employment, housing, and consumer services; and establishing a cooperative movement. Chauteauvert effectively argues that these activities (which predated the Housewives' Leagues and "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" boycotts of the 1930s) laid the foundation for the economic boycotts of the modern civil rights movement.

Ultimately, the activities of the women's auxiliary members resulted in a higher standard of living for working-class families and empowered them. While working in consumer movements and the March on Washington Movement (MOWM), Ladies Auxiliary members gained experience in the legislative process. By the early 1940s, they believed that by applying their efforts to the political process they would achieve a higher standard of citizenship and push the United States toward instituting a racially democratic society. And although their constitution explicitly barred any "political activities," women justified programs that discussed a broad range of "current issues" such as the poll tax and the Equal Rights Amendment as "educational." They used their status as housewives and invoked maternalist arguments to fight for consumer rights, assert their rights as citizens, and to demand racial justice.

By the end of World War II, Auxiliary members tired of the "decorative jobs" assigned to them by Randolph and male IBSCP leaders, formulated a political program that worked in cooperation with, but independently of, the IBSCP. Using letter-writing, lobbying, and voting, the Ladies Auxiliary began to monitor the status of labor bills and push legislators on the state and national level for passage. The Ladies Auxiliary kept its members apprised of the status of important bills through regular bulletins, and special letters instructing them to send telegrams and letters to elected officials. On the local level, members visited with elected officials to discuss issues of importance. The Auxiliary also affiliated or endorsed other organizations such as the Women's Trade Union League and the American Federation of Women's Auxiliaries to Labor to expand the scope of its activities. Despite these independent activities, however, auxiliary president Halena Wilson continued to submit legislative bulletins, convention resolutions, general letters, and her speeches to Randolph for his approval. Wilson announced citizenship duties for auxiliary members, but Randolph continued to define those duties, and the auxiliary program continued to reflect Randolph's political agenda. Despite the fact that Randolph controlled the women's political agenda behind the scenes, Auxiliary women succeeded in developing a sense of political empowerment through their activities and offered a model of political activism to their children that bore fruit in the 1950s and 1960s.

Several factors led to the demise of the Ladies Auxiliary. The end of the Railroad Age marked by the rise of ownership of private automobiles, interstate highway construction, and better air transportation marked the beginning of decline for the Ladies Auxiliary. As railroad companies canceled runs, porters were forced to look elsewhere for work. This meant smaller memberships and declining revenues. Those auxiliaries still in existence increasingly found themselves depending on the IBSCP for financial subsidies. Eventually, some local chapters of the IBSCP allowed the Auxiliaries to succeed or fail as they may, while others believed their financial support meant that they could literally dictate the program development and affairs of the Auxiliaries. Moreover, the Ladies Auxiliary constitution placed limits on the Auxiliaries' independence, strongly encouraging women's dependency on men. A generation gap also developed between the new porters' wives and the old leadership. Younger wives achieved a new class status because of the real changes unionization had wrought, yet could not appreciate the part the Ladies Auxiliary played in obtaining that higher standard of living. Rather than join the Ladies Auxiliary, young women were more inclined to join other organizations, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), that reflected their concern with middle-class issues. Yet it was conflict with the IBSCP, organizational problems, and a lack of financial resources in combination with constitutional limitations that brought the era of the Ladies Auxiliary to a close.

Chateauvert's work offers a logically organized, well-written account of the role African-American women played in trade union organizing. It is a balanced study that reflects the strengths and weaknesses of the Ladies Auxiliary and its leadership. Ladies Auxiliary activities were limited by racism, sexism, male labor ideology, and notions of domesticity, yet these women succeeded in mobilizing and educating members on political issues. Membership in the Ladies Auxiliary empowered African-American women allowing them to leave an indelible mark on twentieth-century history. This study will be an important addition to courses on labor, African-American, and women's history.

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